

Read the Label

Serving size: The serving size is usually less than most people eat. If you eat 2 servings, make sure you double the calories and all of the daily values. When comparing foods, make sure the serving sizes are the same.

Fat: This lists the total amount of fat in one serving. Try to limit the amount of saturated fat and trans fat you eat.

Cholesterol: Try to eat less than 300 mg each day.

Sodium: Try to eat less than 2400 mg of sodium (salt) each day.

Carbohydrates: These help give you energy. They are found in bread, pasta, potatoes, fruits, and vegetables. Good sources of fiber include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, peas and beans. Try to eat 20 to 35 g of fiber per day.

Protein: Protein helps build muscle. It is found in meat, nuts, eggs, fish, and dry beans. Try to eat lean cuts of meat.

Nutrition Facts			
Serving Size 1 cup (120 g)			
Servings Per Container 8			
Amount per serving			
Calories 130 Calories from fat 60			
			% Daily Value*
Total fat	6.5g		10%
Saturated Fat	2.5g		12%
Trans Fat	1g		
Cholesterol	30mg		10%
Sodium	240mg		10%
Total Carbohydrate	15g		5%
Dietary fiber	2.5g		10%
Sugars	3g		
Protein	3g		
Vitamin A 10% Vitamin C 5%			
Calcium 15% Iron 5%			
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.			
	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80
Sat Fat	Less than	20 g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400 mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25mg	30g
Calories per gram:			
Fat 9 Carbohydrate 4 Protein 4			

Calories: A calorie is a measure of energy use. Also listed is the number of calories from fat. The general rule is that no more than 30% of your calories should come from fat.

% Daily Value: This shows how much of the recommended amounts of these nutrients are in one serving (based on a 2,000 calorie diet). These percentages make it easy to compare one brand with another. Just make sure the serving size is the same. The goal is to eat no more than 100% of each nutrient each day.

Vitamins and Minerals: This shows you how much of the recommended amount of certain vitamins and minerals are in the food. Your goal is to reach 100% for each vitamin and mineral every day.

Recommended amounts: Here you can see the recommended daily amount for each nutrient for 2 calorie levels: a 2,000 calorie and a 2,500 calorie daily diet. Your recommended daily calories may be higher or lower, depending on your age, gender, and how active you are. However, notice that the recommended amount of sodium and cholesterol are the same no matter how many calories you eat a day.

... and the Ingredients

Food manufacturers are required to list all ingredients in the food on the label. On a product label, the ingredients are listed in order of predominance, with the ingredients used in the greatest amount first, followed in descending order by those in smaller amounts.

- Avoid food products that contain more than 5 ingredients
- Avoid food products that contain ingredients that a 3rd grader cannot pronounce
- Look for hidden ingredients such as partially hydrogenated oils, added sugars/sweeteners, food coloring, monosodium glutamate (msg), and non-whole grain ingredients.

Reading the Ingredient Label: What to Look For

By Peter Jaret

If you are what you eat, as the saying goes, reading the ingredient list on packaged foods can give you pause. Some foods are laced with dozens of ingredients with complicated names that sound like they belong in a chemistry lab, not on your plate. Some list ingredients that belie the claims made on the front of the package. Consider just two examples:

- A food that trumpets itself as containing whole grains may have more sugar than grains.
- A food that promises to be trans fat free may in fact contain up to 0.5 grams of partially hydrogenated oils, a source of trans fats, in the ingredient list.

Here's what the experts say to look for:

The Word "Whole" as in Whole Grains

Especially for breakfast cereals, crackers, pasta, and breads, the word "whole" should appear as the first or second ingredient, whether whole wheat, oats, rye, or another grain. One way to double-check is to look at the fiber content on the nutrition facts panel. Whole-grain foods should deliver at least 3 grams of fiber per serving and ideally even more.

Hidden Sugars, as in Fructose, Sucrose, Dextrose

More and more packaged foods are sweetened with a baffling array of sugars, which add calories without boosting nutritional value. Ingredients that end in the word "ose" are all forms of sugar, as are honey and corn sweeteners.

A recent study at the University of California, Davis showed that these sweeteners had a similar metabolic effect to other forms of sugar. Still, all sweeteners add calories but few nutrients, and they can contribute to weight problems.

To know exactly how many grams of total sugar a product contains, check out the nutrient facts label.

Partially Hydrogenated Oils: Source of Trans Fats

Partially hydrogenated oils are the primary source of trans fats, which have been shown to be potentially more harmful to arteries than saturated fat. Foods can call themselves "trans-fat free" even if they contain up to half a gram of trans fats per serving. If a food contains partially hydrogenated oils, it contains trans fats. "If that's an item you only eat now and then, you don't need to worry," says Rosenbloom. "But if it's something you eat every day, it's worth looking for a brand that doesn't have partially hydrogenated oils." The American Heart Association recommends choosing vegetable oils and margarines with liquid vegetable oil as the first ingredient and no more than 2 grams of saturated fat per tablespoon, such as tub margarines, canola, corn, safflower, soybean, sunflower, and olive oils.

Artificial Sweeteners, as in Sucralose, Saccharin, Aspartame, Acesulfame

In moderation, these ingredients can cut down on calories in foods like yogurt and beverages. But the Center for Science in the Public Interest warns that some artificial sweeteners can be dangerous in large quantities. Many nutritionists say it's best to consume artificial sweeteners in moderation.

Sodium Nitrite and Sodium Nitrate in Food

Used as a preservative in meats, these chemicals may pose a cancer risk, although the evidence remains controversial. One recent study raised fears that nitrites and nitrates could interact with medications to damage DNA and increase the risk of cancer. The Center for Science in the Public Interest recommends limiting the amount you consume by choosing nitrite-free products when possible.

Artificial Colorings in Food

These additives don't add nutrient value, and some research suggests that some colorings may pose health dangers, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest. The risk is admittedly small, however, and the evidence often inconclusive. Artificial colorings are often found in cereals, candies, sodas, and snack foods, especially those marketed to children. They will be noted on the ingredients list by their color name, such as Yellow 5, Yellow 6, Red 40, Red 3, Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, and Orange B.

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) in Food

Added to foods to enhance flavor, MSG has not been shown to pose a health risk, despite popular concerns about this additive. But some people do experience an unpleasant reaction, known as MSG symptom complex, which includes headache, flushing, sweating, fluttering heartbeat, and shortness of breath.